

United Way of the Midlands Report

On Homeless Coordination Contract and Inclement Weather Center

July 2017 – June 2018

Homeless Coordination Contract & Inclement Weather Center

Final Report 2017-18

Background

In September of 2014, Columbia City Council approved an award to United Way of the Midlands (UWM) to Improve Regional Coordination of Homeless Services in the Midlands. The award was made in partnership with Midlands Area Consortium for the Homeless (MACH), the community's homeless coalition. In addition to the award for coordination, the City asked UWM to assume management of the program to provide emergency winter shelter from November 2014 through March 2015. The contracts to improve regional coordination and operate the winter shelter were renewed for the 2015, 2016, and 2017 fiscal years. To follow is a report on activities July 2017 – June 2018.

Homelessness Data Update: 2018 Point in Time Count

MACH's point-in-time count, led by the City funded UWM Homeless Services Coordinator, was held January 24th-28th. Over five days, 250 trained volunteers, including over 100 in the City, canvassed MACH's counties to conduct one-on-one surveys with people on the streets. To avoid duplication, volunteers collected identifying and demographic information which is entered in the Homeless Management Information System operated by UWM. County-level volunteer coordinators recruited, trained, and deployed volunteers to locations identified by service providers, outreach workers, and people who are or formerly homeless to conduct surveys.

UWM coordinated with MACH special events such as congregate meals, food trucks to dispense meals and food boxes to secure participation. We had success engaging partners for donations of items provided to survey participants which enhanced results. Partners included donations of 600 pairs of socks from Lexington Medical Center, 1,000 pairs of socks from BOMBAS, 500 bus tickets from the COMET, toiletry items from Midlands Technical College, and bedrolls donated by the City's Arts Center.

The point-in-time count is a snapshot of people who are homeless and found on a single day. A single day census cannot offer a full picture of homelessness which typically is a temporary circumstance. The one-day count under reports groups like families with children. Families experiencing homelessness often double up to avoid the streets or other unsheltered settings. They are not included in the count. The quality of a "count" depends on county-level coordinators and volunteers. Richland County consistently demonstrates strong coordination and volunteer participation levels, but MACH's other 13-counties, especially rural counties, can struggle to find coordinators and volunteers.

MACH's 2018 point-in-time count was almost unchanged from 2017 (1,200 people identified in 2017 and 1,205 identified in 2018). **Over the period from 2013 to 2018 there was an overall decrease of 40% of homeless individuals during the night of the Count across MACH's 13-counties with a 45% decrease in Richland County.**

Snapshot of MACH's one-day 2018 results:

- 1,205 people identified as experiencing homeless across the 14-counties
- 200 individuals were unsheltered
- 251 were families with children
- 248 were chronically homeless individuals
- 159 were Veterans
- 122 adults self-reported a serious mental illness

Snapshot of Richland County's 2018 one-day results:

- 823 people identified as experiencing homeless (788 in 2017 one-day count)
- 128 individuals were unsheltered (189 in 2017)
- 199 were chronically homeless (228 in 2017)
- 85 were Veterans (62 in 2017)

In 2018, we were pleased to see more people seeking shelter versus unsheltered settings and less who were chronically homeless. For Richland County, there was over a 50% increase in those seeking shelter and a 14% decrease in people who are chronically homeless. The increase in shelter use is positive. Beyond the safety of shelter vs. living on the street, shelter settings more opportunities for engagement, services and screening for long-term housing. The decrease in chronic homelessness speaks to efforts targeting the most vulnerable for the limited federally funded housing vouchers matched with case management.

Levels of domestic violence survivors seeking shelter decreased during the 2018 point-in-time count (67 people in 2018 and 237 in 2017). Year-to-year comparisons are not reliable because the federal government narrowed the definition of domestic violence for the 2018 count and new data did not reflect the lived experience of previous domestic violence survivors.

In 2017, we conducted our first youth-specific count in Richland County led by the City funded Affordable Housing Coordinator. The Coordinator worked with currently homeless and recently homeless youth to identify locations such as camps, the library, public locations such as parks, and gathering locations like specific shopping centers, or places offering Wi-Fi. Further, McKinney-Vento homeless coordinators in Richland School District One and Two provided outreach to youth identified to determine if they should be included in the HUD count. Social media was used to promote count events held at our youth count headquarters – MIRCI's Youth Drop-in Center (opened January 2017). Incentives were offered to survey participants including warm socks, small food items, and handheld outreach cards linking to our Coordinated Entry System. We repeated the youth count in 2018 and identified double the number of unaccompanied youth.

Despite aggressive efforts to secure 190 new units of federally funded permanent supportive housing over the past five years, resources have not addressed need. The shortage of affordable housing and permanent supportive housing for people with disabling conditions continues to contribute to first time homelessness and prevent people from emerging quickly and with long-term stability. An emerging problem is a lack of resources to house and provide specialized services to an aging homeless population with multiple barriers to independent living. Specialized housing and crisis drop-in centers for people with serious mental illness

have significantly declined due to state-level funding cuts over the years. Additional housing challenges for individuals and families are suggested, but not fully explored, in a recent study of 2016 rental eviction rates by Princeton Sociologist Mathew Desmond found Columbia to be 8th in the nation for eviction judgements. The lack of affordable housing and high eviction rates contribute to housing instability and first-time homelessness.

Coordination of Services

UWM's strategies for improving coordination of homeless services are focused on six goals:

- Engaging people who are high users of the justice system services;
- Ensuring effective outreach and providing resources for families on the street;
- Housing veterans and youth who are homeless;
- Increasing employment and job readiness;
- Improving the service of community meals.

Law Enforcement and Justice Systems

UWM partnered with CPD's North and Metro Regions, 5th Circuit Solicitor's Office, 5th Circuit Public Defender's Office, and City Center Partnership to develop a listing of individuals believed to be experiencing homelessness with frequent interactions with law enforcement and justice systems. The team shares updates and coordinates complex client situations with multiple system and individual level barriers to stability.

Progress with the 74 individuals identified to date in 2018 (January – June 2018):

- 12 are housed
- 42 were screened for supportive housing vouchers (VI-SPDAT vulnerability screening tool)
- 6 are veterans (5 have worked with either Veteran Affairs, Alston Wilkes, or One80 Place)
- 45 actively engage with street outreach workers and we continue with assignments

Street Outreach Coordination

UWM hosts a monthly meeting of outreach workers, Columbia Police Department (CPD), and other key stakeholders to discuss outreach locations and coordination of services. In addition to improving coordination among frontline outreach staff and CPD, the teams address concerns of downtown businesses and neighborhoods. These coordination meetings have produced schedules of locations and times for outreach among the teams to prevent duplication of outreach coverage and targeted specialized outreach teams (such as veteran services or teams working with people experiencing serious mental illness).

Built for Zero

In 2015, the Midlands was one of 75 communities selected to participate in Zero: 2016, a program to improve housing placement of veterans and people who are chronically homeless. Zero:2016 (later renamed 'Built for Zero') supports a goal of functionally ending homelessness among veterans and chronic homelessness by the end of 2017. UWM led the Zero 2016 initiative to address homelessness among veterans and partnered with City of Columbia for the Mayor's Challenge to End Veteran Homelessness.

UWM and Wm. Jennings Dorn Veterans Affairs (VA) Medical Center (Dorn) entered into a data sharing agreement between the HMIS and VA HOMES data systems in 2015, which was the first data sharing agreement of its kind in the Southeast Regional VISN (Veterans Integrated Services Network – VISN). Through unique partnerships, including this deep working relationship with Dorn, 373 veterans were placed into housing resulting in a 37% decrease in homelessness among veterans. We have changed how our community identifies, engages, and houses veterans. UWM coordinates twice monthly veteran specific case conferencing sessions, report newly identified veterans to VA staff monthly to verify eligibility for services through the VA system, and meet monthly with cross agency street outreach teams for engagement assignments.

Motel Vouchers for Families

New in 2017, UWM partnered with Homeless No More to provide (with City Regional contract resources) short-term emergency motel vouchers for families identified by City Police Department officers during non-traditional hours or when shelters were at capacity. Six families were assisted with 47 nights of immediate shelter. After brief motel stays, three families were placed in shelters when space opened, two families entered housing through federally funded rapid rehousing programs, and one family found housing on their own. Referrals are only eligible from City of Columbia Police, not other jurisdictions.

Meal Coordination

The goal of the meal share work is to increase collaboration and communication among community groups that share meals with the public, including people who may be homeless. The meal share collaborative has 36 members who have been very cooperative, and diligent in coming to resolutions for the good of the community. The Meal Share Collaborative has made strong progress in reducing duplication of meal services and improving collaboration.

United Way developed a Community Meal Share Calendar which has been incorporated into the United Way website (www.uway.org). The calendar has been a useful tool for the community. It annotates times, dates, organization, and any additional resources provided by each. Providers have been able to better coordinate meal times and share resources such as items they may offer like backpacks and clothes and has improved community understanding of existing resources available.

UWM partnered with City Parks and Recreation Department to implement an orientation process for prospective meal share providers and established designated time slots. Before City staff issues a permit to serve a meal in Finlay Park the provider is referred to the City funded Homeless Services Coordinator to review partnership opportunities with existing providers, sign the Meal Share Agreement covering agreed upon rules and regulations for organizations sharing meals, and review available time slots. The time slots are for breakfast, lunch, and dinner with one organization designated to receive a permit for each time slot on week-ends and a single evening meal slot for weekdays (no weekday breakfast or lunch since other options are available). The new timeslot system and orientation process have reduced duplication of times and meals offered especially week-ends and sparked new partnerships to combine meals.

We had also had success in diverting new groups to volunteer opportunities at local partners like Family Shelter and Transitions due fill a need for volunteer help and avoid duplication of other meal efforts.

In August 2016, Washington Street UMC changed their lunch time to synchronize with the noontime meals of Transitions and Christ Central on North Main. Additionally, Restorations started the ‘Lunch on the Lawn’ Program offering collaborative space to providers on Sunday on a private property location. UWM thanks these dedicated meal share partners for their efforts to reduce duplication of meal services.

Homeless Coordinated Entry System

UWM worked with statewide partners to create a streamlined entry and referral system to link people experiencing homelessness with available resources. The Coordinated Entry System (CES) integrates the existing infrastructure of the 2-1-1 Helpline with homeless service providers. This virtual network streamlines the assessment and referral process for people who are homeless and precariously housed. CES functions as a tiered approach with a brief screening at provider Access Points to assess the client’s basic needs for housing and referral to agency programs to conduct a more program specific assessment and examine options for housing placement. Screening for vulnerability is used to ensure those with the highest needs and lengths of homelessness are placed in the limited federally funded supportive housing units first. UWM staff then monitors for housing stability over time. CES Access Point locations can be found at <https://www.midlandshomeless.com>

Employment and Training Coordination

Partnered with the Richland Library to host the 2nd annual Breaking Barriers Employment Resource Fair. The employment and resource fair included a career fair readiness workshop and coupon for free business attire at Salvation Army, Dress for Success, and Cooperative Ministry. The event also featured an Expungement Workshop facilitated by SC Appleseed where attendees received a free background check funded by UWM resources and one-on-one session with on-site attorneys. There were 36 vendors at the event. Of the 164 attendees, 13 are currently employed, 9 received on-site resume assistance, 19 attended the expungement workshop, and 11 enrolled in the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act Program as participants.

In 2017, UWM funded Richland Library (UWM resources) to begin a job readiness and employment program for people experiencing homelessness identified at its main branch location. Entering its second year, the program is showing promise and strong results in helping people overcome employment barriers.

Increasing Housing Options

Funding

Annually, UWM submits a consolidated funding application on behalf of MACH to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) to support new and existing housing programs. The HUD FY 2017 funding was awarded for \$2.9 million dollars and included 18 projects in the 14 counties. The awards included one new project of six units supporting long-term youth housing and one new project of six units

supporting parenting youth to rapidly exit homelessness. Since 2006, nearly \$30 million in resources have been brought into the Midlands through this work.

UWM also provides competitive funding for Midlands homeless and financial stability programs. For FY 2018-19 (beginning July 2018), UWM awarded \$1.4 million in funding to support local programs including critical services such as street outreach, sheltering, and new programs targeting unaccompanied youth and helping families rapidly regain housing. UWM submitted a Youth Homeless Demonstration Program federal grant for \$1 million dollars supporting our work with youth homelessness. If awarded, UWM will open a funding competition for youth housing and service programs in late 2018.

Youth in Transition

Increasing housing and services for youth is also a focus of our work on behalf of the City. UWM continues to coordinate the local effort to improve services and housing for youth we refer to as “in transition.” Typically, the youth and young adults are ages 17-24, lack the support to realize their potential and may be exiting foster care, justice systems, be runaways or otherwise without support of a family or guardian. Over the last year, 628 homeless youth 17-24 years were served with some type of housing or service last year (Jan 2016-Jan 2017) in Richland and Lexington Counties. However, we know that many youth do not engage in traditional homeless programs like shelters since those tend to focus on older adult populations. A second edition of the [Youth Plan](#) was released in March 2018 detailing nearly 50 endorsing partners.

In early 2018, UWM launched Resilient Richland, a county-wide initiative to develop a trauma informed system of care for youth in Richland County. A trauma-informed community realizes the prevalence of trauma, recognizes the impact and responses to trauma, and changes practices that could cause more harm. The project emerged from efforts of UWM, Richland School District 2, MIRCI, the Children’s Trust of SC, and the Richland County 5th Circuit Public Defender’s Office. UWM secured planning funds from the Nord Family Foundation to develop a system-wide coordinated initiative.

Youth Housing

The Mental Illness Recovery Center, Inc. (MIRCI) is developing a small housing program for male (identifying) youth in the downtown area. The program will provide housing matched with intensive services and offering these young men the social support that other youth take granted while they also develop skills to improve employment, education and long-term housing. Providing young people stable support early will help prevent homelessness later in their lives. The program should open in September 2018. Additionally, in the last three years, 32 new units of youth permanent and Rapid Rehousing have been developed plus 46 new shelter and transitional housing beds for youth due to UWM’s leadership and aggressive pursuit of federal funding.

Landlord Networks

UWM works to increase affordable housing options. UWM has developed an Affordable Housing Leadership Team with six partner organizations where landlord/property management resources are shared. Created a Landlord Advisory Board, which is made up solely of landlords, for insight and feedback on what they value and as a tool to recruit other landlords.

Fall 2017, UWM launched the Peace of Mind Fund for Landlords and Property Managers to increase housing opportunities by reducing a landlord's risk when renting to tenants who might otherwise be excluded because of no rental history, prior evictions, insufficient income, and criminal history. The Fund is supported by UWM resources.

In May 2018, UWM hosted a Landlord Informational Forum with the Columbia Housing Authority with 60 landlords in attendance. The Forum led to five new landlords accepting Housing Choice Vouchers who had not before. Because of the forum, many of the landlords stopped charging application fees for criminal background checks. CHA reported that the landlords have begun to use the CHA criminal background check instead of ordering one on their own.

Inclement Weather Center

The City contracts with UWM to operate the Inclement Weather Center (IWC) between November 1st and March 31st on nights when the temperature is expected to be 40 degrees or below (according to the National Weather Service), during holidays, or during severe weather. The IWC has a nightly capacity of 240 people and provides adult women and men with a bed, food, shower, clothing, hygiene products, outreach and links to community resources. Clients arrive at the IWC via transportation coordinated under the contract – walk-ups are not allowed due to the dangerous nature of crossing Huger Street to access the shelter. UWM subcontracts with Transitions for the day-to-day operations, Salvation Army for meals, and private vendors for security and transportation.

The IWC first opened for operation this season on November 9th and closed on April 1st. For the season, the Center was open 67 days (65 days prior year) with 894 unduplicated guests (750 prior year) equating to 8,794 nights of shelter and 17,588 meals. Police drop offs increased during the season with 951 total drop offs with 90 calls to Emergency Medical Services. Volunteers (199) participated with check-in and serving meals.

Demographics:

Gender: Male 75% Females 25% 1 transgender

Race: Black 67% White 32% Other 1%

Age: 18-30 years 18% 31-50 years 38% 51-61 years 36% 62+ years 8%

Disabling condition 511 or 55%

Chronically homeless 223 or 24%

Veterans 79 or 8.5%

55% reported no GED or high school diploma

33% report income

A debrief with City staff, CPD, and vendors (Transitions, Salvation Army and private transportation and security) was held in early April to review operations and improvements for next season.

Client Engagement and Street Outreach

Engagement involves both “in reach” at Transitions’ Day Center and outreach to people on the street. Transitions’ Day Center offers respite from the weather, meals, laundry and shower facilities and staff encourages guests to take advantage of the services offered by the 40+ partners who provide health care, mental health care, substance abuse treatment, employment and benefits access on site.

During the 2017-18 IWC season, 172 people exited to emergency shelter (primarily Transitions), 12 moved in to transitional housing, and nine moved into permanent housing. Lack of permanent supportive housing resources for those unable to support their housing independently and affordable housing options is the greatest barrier to increasing successful placements.

IWC staff provides outreach to those who are unsheltered in the community by visiting known, reported or likely locations where people who are homeless congregate. IWC staff reported 35 days of outreach to people on the streets. In addition to providing basic needs items like food, hygiene supplies and bus tickets, people have been linked and referred to housing and service providers.

Budget Wrap-up

Regional Coordination Contract

FY 2017-18 Contract: \$123,400.00
Expenditures: \$119,369.12
Balance: \$4,030.88
(Direct client services in the form of motel vouchers for unsheltered families was under budget)

Inclement Weather Center

FY 2017-18 Contract: \$322,761.71
Expenditures: \$312,272.35
Balance: \$10,489.36
(IWC was open less than 80 days; therefore, under budget)

Proposed for 2018

For 2018, UWM proposes to expand with City Regional contract resources our travel assistance program for people stranded in the Columbia, but with family that will help them reach stability in their home community. UWM began funding this program several years ago with Salvation Army of the Midlands with successful results and proposes to expand the program under the Regional Coordination contract in partnership with Transitions for next fiscal year. Travel assistance would include gas or bus voucher to a home community once a stable situation has been verified and if the individual is deemed medically able to travel on their own.

Closing

Over the past four years, the community has made great strides in addressing homelessness. UWM and its community partners will continue to advance improvements in systems of care and identification of resources to provide the housing needed to end homelessness in the Midlands. We thank the City for its partnership to address this critical issue in the Midlands.

For additional information, please contact Jennifer Moore at jmoore@uway.org or visit our United Way of the Midlands website at www.uway.org and MACH website at www.midlandshomeless.com.